

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

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USDEL MBFR VIENNA

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CINCUSNAVEUR

CINCLANT

CINCPAC
USCINCEUR
USNMR SHAPE
INFO AMCONSUL EDINBURGH
AMCONSUL BELFAST
AMCONSUL LIVERPOOL

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: MARR, MILI, PARM, UK, NATO
SUBJECT: BRITISH DEFENSE REVIEW

1. PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF BRITAIN'S LONG-AWAITED DEFENSE REVIEW WERE ANNOUNCED TO PARLIAMENT ON 3 DECEMBER BY DEFENSE SECRETARY MASON. THE STATEMENT CONTAINS FEW SURPRISES AND APPEARS INTENDED TO DEMONSTRATE THE CABINET'S DETERMINATION TO REDUCE DEFENSE SPENDING WITHOUT CRIPPLING BRITAIN'S DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT OR ITS PROGRAMS. SAVINGS ARE TO BE REALIZED CHIEFLY IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 1975-84 PERIOD, WITH AMOUNT OF GNP DEVOTED TO DEFENSE EXPECTED TO DROP FROM 5.6 PERCENT IN 1974 TO 4.5 PERCENT IN 1984. TOTAL SAVINGS OVER THE PERIOD ARE ESTIMATED AT 4.7 BILLION POUNDS.

2. ECONOMIES ARE TO BE ACHIEVED PRINCIPALLY BY REDUCTIONS IN PERSONNEL (35,000 MILITARY AND 30,000 CIVILIAN), R AND D FUNDS (10 PERCENT), AND THE INTERVENTION FORCES. ARMY AND AIR FORCE COMMITMENTS IN NATO'S CENTRAL REGION WILL BE VIRTUALLY UNTOUCHED, ALTHOUGH BRITAIN'S ABILITY TO REINFORCE THE NATO FLANKS WILL BE GREATLY REDUCED. EXTRA-NATO FORCES ARE TO BE CUT BACK SHARPLY, WITH EARLY WITHDRAWALS SCHEDULED FROM SINGAPORE, BRUNEI, GAN, AND MAURITIUS. MALTA IS TO BE ABANDONED WHEN THE PRESENT ARRANGEMENT EXPIRES IN 1979.

3. WITH THE REDUCTION OF OVERSEAS DEPLOYMENTS, TRANSPORT COMMAND IS TO BE CUT BY HALF AND ADJUSTMENTS MADE AT ALL LEVELS TO REFLECT THESE REDUCTIONS. AMPHIBIOUS LIFT WILL
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BE CUT BACK, AND INTERVENTION FORCES REDUCED TO ONE AIR PORTABLE BRIGADE AND A MARINE COMMANDO GROUP. A NUMBER OF FRIGATES AND SUBMARINES WILL BE PHASED OUT, BUT THE NAVY'S THROUGH-DECK CRUISER AND THE RAF'S CONTROVERSIAL MRCA PROJECT WILL CONTINUE. THE GOVERNMENT WILL TRY TO NEGOTIATE A TERMINATION OF THE SIMONSTOWN AGREEMENT. IT ALSO HAS DECIDED TO AGREE TO U.S. PROPOSALS FOR "A RELATIVELY MODEST EXPANSION OF THE FACILITY ON DIEGO GARCIA". THE POLARIS SUBMARINE FORCE IS TO BE KEPT AND ITS "EFFECTIVENESS" MAINTAINED.

4. PARLIAMENT IS SCHEDULED TO DEBATE THE GOVERNMENT'S DEFENSE PROGRAM SOMETIME BEFORE CHRISTMAS. BRITISH REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRENTLY TABLED THE CABINET'S PROVISIONAL DECISION ON DEFENSE IN NATO ON 3 DECEMBER, AND THE UK EXPECTS THAT UP TO TWO MONTHS WILL BE REQUIRED TO COMPLETE CONSULTATIONS THERE. THE WHITE PAPER ON DEFENSE WILL BE PUBLISHED IN LATE FEBRUARY OR EARLY MARCH FOLLOWING NATO CONSULTATIONS, PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE, AND FINAL CABINET APPROVAL OF THE MULTI-YEAR DEFENSE PROGRAM.

5. FULL TEXT OF SECRETARY MASON'S STATEMENT IS BEING SENT BY AIRGRAM.

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